

Vendor Liaison: the Canadian Perspective

Abstract: This article by Shaunna Mireau contains a brief update on the activities of the Canadian Association of Law Libraries Vendor Liaison Committee and shares the unique features of the relationships between Canadian law librarians and the vendor community.

Keywords: vendor relations; Canada; CALL

Introduction

We live in a world where relationships are the key to all things. I say this while looking at my 2010 time sheets, noticing that like many law firm librarians, I spent a huge amount of time monitoring things that I learned about from people in my Network. It consists of colleagues, CALLeagues, LinkedIn connections, connections through Martindale-Hubbell Connected, Ning, Facebook, etc and vendors of course.

Vendors should not be at the end of the list of a law librarian's network. In fact, they are not. Vendors are part of the network of CALL members, LinkedIn connections, connections through Ning or Facebook and all of the other ways in which we communicate.

Law librarians in Canada may have a slightly different perspective on vendor relationships than our colleagues in other nations. There are three factors that come to mind as I write this:

1. Canada is really big¹
2. Canada is also very small
3. There are few domestic vendors of Canadian legal information

How do these factors relate to the Canadian Association of Law Libraries and vendor relations? The intent of this article is to explain that.

Canada is really big

How big is Canada? Canada is so big that one of our home grown, quirky, Canadian folk bands, the Arrogant Worms, wrote a song about it (<http://www.arrogant-worms.com/music/canadas-really-big-2/>)! What does that have to do with vendor relationships? I will share some personal theories.

When great distances separate you from those whom you are required to work closely with, collegial

relationships require more effort. For instance, I may see my firm's LexisNexis or Westlaw Canada representative once each year.

My sales rep may not be at the CALL Annual Conference, depending where the conference is located. You can imagine the expense for vendors of transporting their national sales force to a conference when an average domestic flight in central Canada (where most vendor head offices are located) to one of the edges costs about \$600 for a flight and most of a day for travel time. Vendor representatives are also spread out across the country in order to serve their customers and it is not necessarily feasible for everyone to gather at our conference every year.

I may not be at the CALL annual conference depending where it is located for the same reasons as the vendors. I am sure that this applies to organisations worldwide; conference attendance to the same organisation's conference each year is not always in the budget. Some domestic vendors are only accessible in person in the show space at CALL's annual conference for the same economies of scale that applies to law librarians.

Probably due in part to Canada's geography quotient, local law library groups tend to be very active. Often these groups have some vendor relation's activities in their mandate. For example, the Toronto Association of Law Libraries has an active Publisher Liaison Committee.²

Canada is very small

To state Canada's population size in relative terms is just a little embarrassing. There are just over 34 million Canadians.³ Statistics from 2007 peg the number of lawyers in Canada at 99, 617.⁴ CALL/ACBD currently has 381 members, while this is not representative of every law librarian in Canada, it compares to BIALL with over 800 members and AALL with over 4,700 members.

Contrast the head count of Canadian law librarians with some vendor statistics. Thomson Reuters: "Over

55,000 employees in more than 100 countries".⁵ Carswell (a Thomson Reuters Business) has 645 employees.⁶ LexisNexis Canada: "A member of Reed Elsevier, LexisNexis helps customers achieve their goals in more than 100 countries, across six continents, with over 13,000 employees."⁷

These numbers illustrate an important point about a potential problem with Canadian law librarian relations with vendors: we are a very small market.

Working with vendors in a small market

Even with the very limited voice that Canadian law librarians have in terms of market size, legal information vendors in Canada are responsive to our collective needs. Several examples of vendor responsiveness in the Canadian market can be shared from recent work done by CALL/ACBD's Vendor Liaison Committee.

Currently VLC is working on issues about usage reports for electronic services. Over the last year and a half, the committee has performed some needs analysis, compiled a list of desired usage reporting features and identified data points that are relevant to us. Recently members of the committee have met (by conference call due to geography) decision makers for our largest legal vendors to discuss our usage reporting needs. Vendors are willing to listen to our desires and make changes where economically feasible. Our vendors are our partners in delivering relevant, timely and cost effective information to our users. Usage statistics from our vendors can help us ensure that we are providing the right information at the right time and clients are paying the right fee for information regarding the problem we are helping them solve.

Dialogue and partnership with legal information vendors is not a new phenomenon of vendor relations in Canada in a post global economic crisis. Back in 2007, the CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee developed *Tackling the Loose-Leaf Format, an Issue Paper for the Working Group to Develop Best Practices*.⁸ This issue paper and the dialogue that it facilitated with representatives from vendors and CALL/ACBD members resulted in the CALL- VLC *Code of Good Practices for Loose-leaf Publications*.⁹ Though there have been challenges along the way, this document, drafted jointly with loose-leaf publishers is an excellent example of how Canadian law librarians and legal information vendors operate in partnership with each other.

Creating opportunities for dialogue is important. Time is devoted to a Vendors Open Forum at the CALL/ACBD annual conference each year. During an hour long, audio recorded, session, CALL/ACBD members have an opportunity to ask questions of all or specific legal publishers on any vendor relations related topic. Questions are solicited in advance to give vendors an opportunity

to research and prepare answers. Questions may also be asked on the spot at Conference as well, provided that some very basic ground rules¹⁰ are followed:

Open Forum Guidelines

Vendor Open forum: Ground rules

The purpose of the forum is to foster open and professional dialogue between the vendors and customers.

- Any question or comment presented in a constructive manner is acceptable.
- Any question or comment can be followed up with one additional question or comment.
- If a comment or question is primarily directed to a specific publisher, other publishers may also comment on the issue.
- Speakers are asked to speak briefly on any given topic, subject to the discretion of the chair.
- Vendors are welcome to comment on customer service issues.
- Questions and comments may be presented in either French or English.

The Open Forum audio recording is made available as an MP3 download on the Vendor Liaison Committee portion of the CALL/ACBD website at www.callacbd.ca. This recording and our committee page generally, is one of the methods of communication between the VLC and our stakeholders – CALL members.

The CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee has a fairly broad mandate¹¹:

The mandate of this Committee is to provide a liaison between the members of the Association and vendors of legal information by:

- Providing advice to members in resolving issues that relate to vendor relationships and products.
- Gathering input from the membership and co-ordinating efforts to advocate, recommend and propose solutions to our common issues that relate to vendor relationships and products.
- Monitor trends and developments in the industry and communicate such information to the membership.

Because the lines of committee involvement should only supplement an individual librarian's personal business relationship with a vendor, we have developed a *Best Practices Document for Librarian – Vendor Relations*.¹² This document evolved, in part through suggestions from active vendor relation groups in local law library associations. In Canada, local law library associations are separate entities from CALL/ACBD, though cross-over membership is wide. Co-operation between groups is a recurring theme for Canadian law librarians, whether

that is between librarians and vendors or between each other.

domestic legal information vendors and the number seems to shrink regularly.

There are few domestic legal information vendors

The last factor that I outlined as having an impact on Canadian law librarian/vendor relations, that there are few domestic legal information vendors, is probably true in most markets. 2010 saw Thomson Reuters purchase Canada Law Book.¹³ Globalisation of legal information vendors is a trend that will probably continue. An excellent visual of this is available via 3 Geeks and a Law Blog titled “Graphing the Shrinking Legal Publishing World” from April 22, 2010 at <http://www.geeklawblog.com/2010/04/graphing-shrinking-legal-publishing.html>. Like other countries, Canada has a diminishing number of purely

Conclusion

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on behalf of the Canadian Association of Law Libraries Vendor Liaison Committee. I hope that, as in years past, we will see members of BIALL at our Annual Conference, perhaps sharing thoughts at our Vendor Liaison Committee business meeting – anyone is welcome to attend. Our 2011 Conference is in the lovely city of Calgary, Alberta, May 15–18, 2011. One of the conference sessions this year deals with the topic of usage statistics. Look for a link to our Conference programme online at www.callacbd.ca. We would be happy to build a relationship with you, because relationships are the key to all things.

Footnotes

¹Canada is the 2nd largest country when ranked by landmass. We are very geographically far flung and our vendors often have huge territories. We are also complicated by having a bijural, bilingual and federal legal system.

²See the TALL website at <http://www.law-lib.utoronto.ca/tall/governance/publishers.asp>

³Source: Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, Wednesday September 29, 2010 <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100929/dq100929b-eng.htm>

⁴Source: Federation of Law Societies of Canada, <http://www.flsc.ca/en/pdf/statistics2007.pdf>

⁵Source: <http://thomsonreuters.com/about/>

⁶Source: Macleans magazine, Top 100 employers 2009 <http://www2.macleans.ca/2009/10/14/the-top-100-2009/2/>

⁷Source: <http://www.lexisnexis.ca/en/about-us/>

⁸Available on the CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee site via <http://www.callacbd.ca/index.php/publisher/articleview/frmArticleID/386/>

⁹Available on the CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee site at http://www.callacbd.ca/images/File/Vendors%20SIG/call_final_-_goodpractices.doc

¹⁰Available on the CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee site at <http://www.callacbd.ca/images/File/Vendors%20SIG/guidelines.doc>

¹¹Available on the CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee site via <http://www.callacbd.ca/index.php/publisher/articleview/frmArticleID/386/>

¹²Available on the CALL/ACBD Vendor Liaison Committee site at [http://www.callacbd.ca/images/File/Vendors%20SIG/VLC_checklist\(4\).htm](http://www.callacbd.ca/images/File/Vendors%20SIG/VLC_checklist(4).htm)

¹³News Release regarding acquisition of Canada Law Book by Thomson Reuters <http://www.canadalawbook.ca/corporate-news.html>

Biography

Shaunna Mireau is the chair of CALL's VLC and has been on the committee since 2009. She is the Director of Knowledge Management and Libraries for the Field Law firm in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She blogs at <http://www.slw.ca> and <http://mireau.blogspot.com> on legal research and technology issues.

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